

The Stages of Dementia

Some people talk of a seven-stage model of dementia, which typically follows this path. Stages 1 and 2 refer to general age-related changes that may never develop into a dementia. The mild (3), moderate (4), moderately severe (5) and severe (6) stages all follow a general principle of steady deterioration. The final stage (7) is rarely encountered as many succumb to other health conditions rather than dementia.

This factsheet will give you some indication of what stages 3 to 6 might look like and mean for you. Remember each person's journey through dementia is different; severity of symptoms will differ as will the sequence in which they occur. Time scales can also vary widely and different types of dementia have different symptoms, especially in the early stages. Gradually, as the brain damage spreads, different types of dementia and their symptoms begin to look more alike.

Mild or Early Stages

In the early stage of Alzheimer's disease, symptoms typically include forgetfulness, losing or misplacing things, and difficulty finding the right words. While it is not uncommon to experience these memory problems as we age, they become disturbing when they occur more frequently and begin to interfere with daily life. Individuals may also become easily confused or show poor judgment with planning and decision-making.

Early-stage vascular dementia is more associated with difficulty planning, decision-making, and following steps. Other early symptoms include slower speed of thought, difficulty maintaining focus, and increased likelihood of experiencing anxiety, depression, and mood swings.

Other symptoms in early stage may include fluctuating attention span, visual or auditory hallucinations and impaired motor skills, (Lewy Body dementia), and changes in behaviour (Frontotemporal dementia, FTD). Common behavioural changes include becoming uncharacteristically selfish, apathetic, or uninhibited. Over-eating can also be a problem and individuals might act impulsively and inappropriately in social situations.

Moderate or Middle Stage

In this stage, individuals with Alzheimer's disease are more likely to experience increased confusion, greater memory loss, and worsening judgment. They may exhibit confusion about where they are or what day it is. They may also have difficulty recalling personal information, such as their address or phone number or important dates like birthdays or anniversaries. Simple arithmetic is more difficult as well as managing finances. Some individuals may also be at increased risk of restlessness and wandering.



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Cont.

In the other types of dementia, early symptoms will become more pronounced (e.g. motor decline in dementia with Lewy bodies, or inappropriate behaviours in FTD). These diseases will also start to resemble the moderate stage of Alzheimer's disease.

During this stage, individuals with dementia are likely to begin to need more assistance. They may need help with some basic daily tasks, such as dressing, bathing, and grooming. There may be changes in sleep patterns, as well as in their personality and behaviour. For example, individuals with dementia might experience increased paranoia or fear.

As family members and carers, it is important to recognise that not all personality changes or behaviours are necessarily symptoms of the disease. Some behaviours, (for example, increased fear, social withdrawal, and depression), may be perfectly reasonable responses to the difficult changes they are going through. It is therefore important to try to understand their feelings whenever possible, as there may be something you can do to help alleviate their concerns or frustrations and improve their well-being.

Moderately Severe/Severe or Late Stage

In severe dementia individuals lose their ability to communicate fluently or engage in conversation, though they may still be able to speak. They will be unable to recognise some faces and be confused about their surroundings and environment.

Individuals typically experience a loss of physical capabilities such as difficulty eating (including swallowing), inability to control bladder and bowel movement, and difficulty walking (eventually becoming unable to walk).

The early differences between the various types of dementia diminish as they begin to look increasingly similar, characterised by cognitive and physical decline as well as behavioural changes such as agitation and irritability.

In late stage dementia, individuals commonly require full-time assistance, support and nursing. Whilst they may not be able to express what they need research shows that some core of the 'self' remains, (Alz.org 2020). Connections can still be made throughout this late stage when preserving quality of life and dignity for the individual is paramount.

If you need any help or guidance, want to find out about other activities and services, or just need someone to talk to who understands your situation, Dementia Friendly Keighley is here for you.

You can call us on **07452 773788** between **10am and 2pm daily**, text (**SMS**) or **WhatsApp 'CALL BACK'** on the same number or leave a message outside of these hours and we will call back as soon as possible. Please note: Times and days of our activities and services are subject to change, so please call for up to date information.

